



**Mayer
Daak**



A Joint Statement by the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Mayer Daak, and Odhikar on the occasion of International Week of the Disappeared 2021

BANGLADESH: Government must conduct impartial and thorough investigations into all cases of enforced disappearance and bring the perpetrators to justice

Dhaka/Manila/Paris, 25 May 2021: Every year, advocates against enforced disappearance commemorate the International Week of the Disappeared on the last week of May. This week, AFAD, FIDH, Mayer Daak, and Odhikar join the global community in remembering those who have been forcibly disappeared and call upon the government of Bangladesh to return all disappeared persons to their families and ensure justice for the victims. The denial by the Bangladeshi authorities of their continued practice of enforced disappearance - particularly targeting political opposition activists and dissidents - and their unwillingness to take any action to address this serious crime deserves condemnation.

Under certain circumstances, enforced disappearance is considered a crime against humanity and prohibited under international law. It constitutes a blatant and serious violation of rights enshrined under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention against Torture, to which Bangladesh is a state party. These rights include: the right to life; the right to freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment; the right to personal liberty and security; the right to recognition as a person before the law; and the right of all detained persons to be treated with dignity and humanity. It causes tremendous suffering among the families of the disappeared who have not been able to ascertain the fate of their loved ones. In addition, many families and relatives of the disappeared have faced threats and harassment by law enforcement agencies and ruling party members for speaking out about the disappearance of their family members in public.

In Bangladesh, enforced disappearances remain unabated amid the COVID-19 pandemic, assaulting dissenting voices that are critical of the government's repressive policies and actions. Some of the disappeared have resurfaced in government's custody having been arrested under the draconian Digital Security Act, 2018. Odhikar has documented 11 victims of enforced disappearance from January to April 2021.

Disappeared persons are often subjected to torture; some become victims of extrajudicial killings but most remain missing for years. The COVID-19 pandemic has been an excuse for the government to curtail freedoms of movement, assembly, association, and expression. These restrictions have more adversely affected the victims of human rights abuses and their families. Access to information has been seriously hindered even as the restrictions have further entrenched concealment of the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared.

Since a large majority of the victims of enforced disappearance were known to be breadwinners, the family members left behind have been forced to live in miserable conditions, which have been exacerbated by the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, their mental health and psychosocial well-being have been seriously affected.

International organizations, including the UN human rights monitoring mechanisms have consistently urged the Bangladesh government to cease the practice of enforced disappearance. However, the government continues to deny its perpetration of this egregious offense. The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) has transmitted several cases of enforced disappearance to the Bangladeshi authorities. Regrettably, the Bangladeshi authorities have brazenly ignored the WGEID despite repeated reminders. We are deeply concerned over the continuous lack of response from the government to the persistent calls by the families of the disappeared for investigations into the plight of their missing kin. The obstinate denial of the government that enforced disappearances persist and its refusal to disclose the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared persons indicate its unwillingness to address this serious violation of human rights.

AFAD, FIDH, Mayer Daak, and Odhikar believe that the right to truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence must be ensured to all persons. The WGEID and other UN special procedures have been repeatedly barred from visiting the country, despite numerous requests. We call on the government of Bangladesh to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance without further delay and to grant UN special procedures unhindered access to the country. We also call upon the international community to pressure the government to immediately stop this heinous crime, conduct impartial and thorough investigations into all cases of enforced disappearance, and bring the perpetrators to justice.

###

*The **Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD)** is a federation of human rights organizations working directly on the issue of involuntary disappearances in Asia. Envisioning a world without desaparecidos, AFAD was founded on 4 June 1998 in Manila, Philippines. AFAD was the recipient of the 2016 Asia Democracy and Human Rights Award conferred by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy. www.afad-online.org*

*The **International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)** is the world's oldest non-governmental human rights organization. Founded in 1922, FIDH federates 192 member organizations from 117 countries. Its core mandate is to promote respect for all the rights set out in the UDHR. www.fidh.org*

***Mayer Daak** ("Mother's Call") is a platform of the families of victims of enforced disappearances in Bangladesh with the common goal of seeking the whereabouts of their loved ones and advocating for justice for the victims.*

***Odhikar**, meaning 'rights' in Bangla, is a registered human rights organization based in Dhaka, Bangladesh established on October 10, 1994 by a group of human rights defenders, to monitor human rights violations and create wider awareness. It holds special consultative status with the ECOSOC of the United Nations. www.odhikar.org*